

LutheranWoman

June 2011

TODAY



PROCESSED Breaking and Remaking
MAY 17 2011 Golden Together

Time for a Tune-Up
A Hard Truth





“...She has performed a good service
[tr. a beautiful thing] for me...Truly I
tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed
in the whole world, what she has done will
be told in remembrance of her.”

– Mark 14:6-9 (NRSV)

KALOS

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Legacy Society

Ka • los – **καλός** [Greek] good; lovely; beautiful.

Introducing Kalos, a legacy recognition society developed to celebrate friends of the ELCA who have designated a gift in their will, trust or to an endowment to support this church's work.

The woman from Bethany broke the jar of fragrance to give Jesus a priceless gift and show her love, no matter the cost. Jesus recognized the beauty in her gift. Like the woman, you too can demonstrate your love for Jesus and this church.

We invite you to become a member of Kalos.

Through Kalos, you can remember the ministries of the ELCA that mean the most to you and make a significant, meaningful and life-changing difference for our church.

To learn more, contact the ELCA Foundation today at 800-638-3522 or elcafoundation@elca.org.



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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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RENEW, RESPOND, REJOICE!

VOLUME 24 NUMBER 5 JUNE 2011

It's time to renew our faith lives, respond to God, and rejoice in our many blessings.

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VOICES

A Right Spirit

by Terri Lackey

True renewal requires

more than a week's vacation or a hot bubble bath. I know I need a spiritual boost when I scream at drivers who fail to signal.

Following two weeks off at Christmas, I thought I was truly renewed. Nothing bothered me. Not my neighbor's barking dogs. Not crazy drivers. Not long lines.

The bliss was short. When my eyes shot blazing at the person who took the parking spot I was going for, I knew my renewal had come to a screeching halt.

In this first session of our summer Bible study, Renew, Respond, Rejoice!, our authors—Catherine Malotky and David Engelstad—inform us that “renewal is not all about sipping iced tea on the beach! It's often hard work, disruptive, and even painful to get to the other side of a hard heart or a narrow perspective.”

To be truly renewed, they say, means “something fundamental has to change in order for life to be different on the other side.”

Often renewal takes breaking and remaking. In her article by this title, Martha Stortz asks whether we seek change or are averse to it. “Do you live by routines? Or do you live to try the latest new gadget?”

When cancer shattered Martha's and her late husband's lives, change chose them, she wrote. “We could only choose whether change would renew or destroy us.” Later, she affirms that “God's change offers all of us the consolation we crave, for God's change leads to renewal and not destruction.”

To avoid destruction or ruin, Sonja Solomonson in “Time for a Tune-Up” proposes we design a “maintenance routine for our bodies and souls.” Suggesting that we take better care of our cars than ourselves, she writes that women must believe they deserve to self-pamper.

“For starters we might remember that God spent six days creating and one resting,” she writes. ...And “Jesus often pulled away from the crowds, too, so he could pray and be renewed.” Solomonson offers us a “tool kit” of practical self-care tips.

Tending to relationships sometime means speaking hard truths to our friends, family, and even those who sign our paychecks. In this month's Bible study session, Nathan risks his own well-being by pointing out (gently and ingeniously) King David's abominable behavior. Kim Beckmann, in “A Hard Truth,” recounts when a friend did the same for her.

“Bob listened to my rant for a while. But as I wound down, he brought a good judgment on me instead. ...Once I saw the log in my own eye I was more able to address the speck in my brothers' and sisters' eyes. With a right spirit, I approached the conflict without threats, fear, and defensiveness (otherwise known as huffing and puffing).”

As the sun warms your face and the flowers burst with new life, consider what change could move you toward renewal this summer. 🌿

Terri Lackey is managing editor for *Lutheran Woman Today* magazine.



WE US THIS DAY

Neutral Zone

Robert O. Wyatt

But those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).

Most of us dream of achieving a stage in life when all will be well. We pine for a time when things will stabilize, when change will cease, when we will live happily ever after. Most of us also know in our hearts that such times rarely come, and, if they do come, they are usually brief. More often, life moves from stage to stage, through transition after transition. Some transitions end well and lead to the renewal of our spirits. Some transitions end badly, with a worse outcome than we expected.

Some change we choose—a marriage, a new job, a new child, a divorce. Other changes we do not choose—an illness, the loss of a job, another child, a divorce. As William Bridges reminds us in his book, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, just because we choose to make a change is no guarantee that things will go well. Many a person has been forced out of an old job, only to find renewed life in a new one. And many have chosen to leave one relationship in hope of finding a better match, only to watch life descend into chaos.

Bridges helpfully cautions us to recognize the pain and celebrate the joy as we end one stage of life. But he also cautions that we must be willing to spend time in “the neutral zone” before we rush into a new beginning. The neutral zone is an uncomfortable place—even a fright-

ening place—where we question ourselves, doubt our decisions, and flounder before we can make a new beginning. And, because the neutral zone is often so uncomfortable, we try to skip over that phase and rush toward a new beginning before our soul has done its work. That is a mistake. We must live in the neutral zone, with its uncertainties, frustrations, and doubts. Put another way, as people of faith, we must wait upon the Lord.

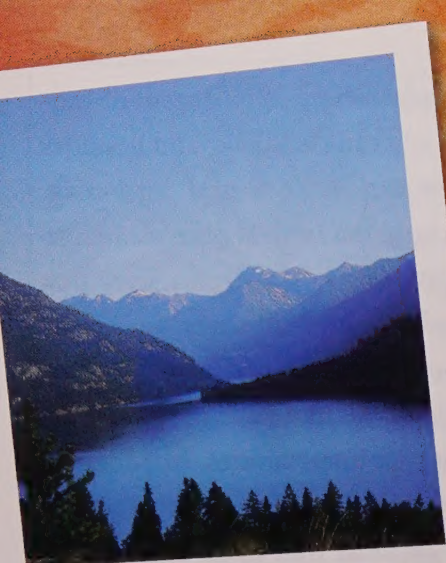
As I approached my 65th birthday, I began thinking about winding down my job as a parish pastor and moving on to the next big thing in my life. Should I write a book on the spiritual life? Should I resume the study of Shakespeare I abandoned after graduate school? Should I continue my old academic career as a survey researcher, starting with a new polling firm in Mexico? Should I learn Hebrew? Hurry up, I told myself. You don't have much time left to make your mark on the world in a big way.

But then, with the help of a gifted spiritual companion, I began to realize that I am beginning something entirely different. I am beginning to live in the sabbath of my life—a time of quiet, reflection, and blessedness. And that, far from being an ending, it is a place to dwell and wait upon the Lord. The sabbath is the most sanctified of neutral zones. After the sabbath comes the feast of the resurrection. 🌿

The Rev. Robert O. Wyatt is rector of St. Helena's Episcopal Church in Burr Ridge, Ill., and a spiritual director and retreat leader in the Spirituality Network of Chicago (www.spiritichicago.org).

HOLDEN TOGETHER

by Carol Mueller



I HAVE TWO THINGS IN MY HOME I'LL NEVER CHANGE. ONE IS A PLAIN WOODEN CROSS ABOUT SIX INCHES HIGH THAT HANGS ON THE WALL OVER MY BED.

It reminds me daily that I'm a child of God. I don't remember where I got that cross, but I've had it since I was small. It was probably from my childhood congregation, Our Saviour's English Lutheran Church in Chicago.

The other is worldlier, but exudes its own whimsical grace. It's a wood-framed, cross-stitch rendering of Peter Pan, James M. Barrie's endearing, enduring symbol of perpetual youth. It hangs on my office wall next to my computer. The like-

ness is so good that the elegantly stitched script above Peter's head is almost redundant: *Peter Pan Lives*.

Of course he does. He was the one who sang "I Won't Grow Up" as I was growing up. It was a song my oldest friend Midgie and I adopted as our theme song, always giggling as we sang the second line: "I will never be a man."

No way. We were girls. But we liked the notion of being kids forever and having fun and adventures like Peter Pan. In my cross-stitch

portrait, however, there's more to the message. A smaller, vertical legend marches down from Peter's knees to his elfin shoes: *Carol & Midgie 50 yrs.*

Midgie created that portrait for my 50th birthday and it still packs a nostalgic wallop. It reminds me of youth and laughter and the child within, even though I have grown up and grown older.

It also reminds me of Midgie, dear friend and a faithful Christian that I have known my entire life.



Photos courtesy of Holden Village

When I was born, Midge—given the name “Marguerite”—was 19 months old, and my earliest memories of her involve her. She lived four doors from me in the Portage Park neighborhood on Chicago’s north-west side, the heart of what’s called the bungalow belt.”

We grew up together in sturdy brick bungalows, living sturdy, mid-century, Midwestern lives, pretty much like the other kids in the neighborhood. But our values, behavior, and understanding of right and wrong were leavened by the lessons about Jesus we learned every week

in Sunday school. Midge and I were both Lutherans, but we didn’t go to Sunday school together because we belonged to different churches. She went to Nebo, a Swedish American Lutheran Church congregation, and I went to a Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran church. But we learned the same things. Early on we knew the Ten Commandments and could recite them easily.

Later, when we were confirmed, both of us had Luther’s Small Catechism—and all the meanings—securely deposited in our memory banks. This is most certainly true.

Though I can’t recall discussing the Bible the way we discussed, say, *Black Beauty*, I think we understood that our common beliefs were always there for us, like a safety net that would catch us if we stepped over the edge.

Despite our shared religion, we had different personalities. Midge was shy and quiet, hesitant to voice an opinion. I was the opposite: talkative, excitable, and apt to speak before I thought.

We were also different in stature and appearance. Midge was short and slight, with blue eyes and what

was then called “dishwater blond” hair. I was bigger and taller, with brown eyes and brown hair. Paradoxically, I was the one who got sunburned and peeled.

AT THE VILLAGE

Some things don’t change. “Look at you, brown as a nut and wiry as a kid,” I told Midge, as she laced up her hiking boots in the room we shared last summer at Holden Village, the ELCA retreat center in Washington’s Cascade Mountains.

It’s not that my old friend hasn’t changed. Her dishwater blond hair is now snow white and her tan face has been engraved by 1,000 splendid suns. The years have taken their toll on me, too: a few extra pounds, a bad hip and mystery hair, the kind that’s been colored so long I have no idea what’s coming out of my head.

But so what? After almost six decades we were together again like 10-year-olds, to play and pray, hike and relax, and study God’s word in a wonderful wilderness setting.

There can be no place more scenic than Holden Village. An old mining town that has been a retreat destination for Lutherans and other people of faith since the early 1960s, it is remote—accessible only by boat and bus—and breathtakingly beautiful. Snow-capped peaks of the northern Cascades tower over the village, and huge pine trees wrap

it in vibrant green. What a magnificent place to reconnect with an old friend—not that we ever disconnected. It’s just that our lives took different paths. As Midge remarked in an e-mail before our trip: “This will be the largest block of time we’ve spent together since we were kids. I wonder how we’ll do.”

Good question. It was easy when we were kids. We both enjoyed books, horseback riding, hopscotch, and swimming at Portage Park pool. And we played endless games of Parcheesi, Monopoly, Chinese Checkers, and Old Maid. We seldom argued, but when we did, we made up the next day.

What eventually came between us was high school. Midge got there before I did and entered a different world: new friends, new interests, a new schedule. We couldn’t walk to school together anymore.

Now we had less in common, but we remained friends. I think it was our faith that held us together over the long haul.

After high school Midge went to an Evangelical Covenant college and met David, who was studying for the ministry. When both graduated they were married, and Midge joined the Evangelical Covenant Church.

When I graduated from high school I went to community college and married Bob, a young man from my congregation. Midge

stood up for my wedding and stood up for hers. Then David was called to a parish Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, and we said good-bye.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

There were visits, of course. When we both had small kids, Bob and I visited Midge and David in Michigan where they lived in a farmhouse and David served two rural congregations. Then he was called to a church in Spokane, Wash., where they have lived for the last 35 years.

Since then, Midge has done the visiting because she still has family here. So I have seen her every year or two just for lunch or dinner. We kept in touch at first with cards, letters, and an occasional phone call. Then e-mail came along and made our communications easier and more frequent.

Every so often Midge invited us to come out to Washington, but life always got in the way. Work was busy, kids got married, grandchildren were born.

“We’ll come after we retire,” she said. But life—and death—intervened again when my husband of 42 years was diagnosed with end-stage cancer. I e-mailed Midge the news and still remember her reply. “Oooohh I wish I could be there to make you tea and hold your hand.”

I wished she could, too.

By this time Midge had rejoined

Lutheran church. Her husband had taken a job as chaplain at a nearby Lutheran Retirement Home and they joined Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Spokane Valley, near their home. It was a blessing for the ELCA, because Midge has been very active in the life of the church. She and her quilting group have sewn hundreds of quilts for Lutheran World Relief, and a few years ago she went to Tanzania with a LWR women's study group to learn of the church's work there and bring the message back home.

Midge also has cared for creation her whole life. She gardens, composts and hangs out laundry half the year. She has no air conditioning and she didn't have a clothes washer—until I arrived.

Last summer I finally made it to Spokane. The invitation was irresistible. The gist of Midge's e-mail: "My pastor is leading a weekend retreat to Holden Village in late June. Why don't you come out here for a visit and we can go together?" I think it over.

I did, for about a minute. Then I replied and wrote YES! YES! YES!

CREATION CLOSE UP

The Bible study for the retreat was local for our surroundings: the creation story. We read the first three chapters of Genesis, which include both accounts of creation and the fall and punishment of Adam and

Eve. Pastor Matt Larson of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church led a lively, informative three-session study. Here's just a little of what I learned:

The second creation account is older than the first and was written by Yahwists, those who refer to God as Yahweh, or the Lord God, rather than simply God, as in the first account.

Both accounts were written by priests who sought to preserve their beliefs by recording them.

When asked to describe the creation story, members of our group offered similar words: *allegory, symbolic, myth, parable*.

Pastor Larson's lesson about Adam and Eve: "There is judgment, there are consequences, but there is no abandonment by God."

His take-away message: "Just because it's not real doesn't mean it's not true."

One other thing I learned: Midge no longer hesitates to speak up—to anyone. While discussing the Eve-created-from-Adam's-rib story, Larson remarked that men actually have one less rib than women. Midge sought out her pastor afterward. "I have a degree in biology," she told him. "Men and women have the same number of ribs."

At Sunday night Eucharist we heard a powerful sermon by guest Bible study teacher Alan Storey, a Methodist minister and social

justice advocate from South Africa. Drawing from the lesson in 2 Kings 1, about Elijah bringing down fire on troops sent by King Ahaziah, he excoriated America for "raining down fire" on the Middle East and called for forgiveness and reconciliation in our foreign relations.

Not everyone agreed, but that's the Holden way. Guest teachers present a diversity of views and discussion is encouraged in the spirit of Christian love. That night Midge and I stayed up late talking.

We found that despite different lifestyles, we have come to the same conclusions on major political, ethical, and moral issues. We oppose the war in Afghanistan, consider ourselves feminists, and support the ELCA vote to ordain pastors in same-sex relationships. I don't think we've ever felt closer.

A few weeks later, Midge e-mailed me that the U.S. Forest Service might be shutting down Holden Village for two years in the future to clean up the copper tailings from the mine. "I'm glad we went when we did," she said.

Me too.

Midge and Carol, 70 years and counting. Thanks be to God. ☸
Carol Mueller, a freelance writer, belongs to Lutheran Church of the Ascension, Northfield, Ill.

To learn more about Holden Village, go to www.holdenvillage.org.



HEALTH WISE

The Hurt in Your Head

by Molly M. Ginty

Teri Robert had visions.

Plagued by frequent migraines that typically included an aura or hallucination, she watched wavy lines and black spots dance before her eyes whenever her condition flared up.

"The pain was horrible, nausea gripped me, and I literally couldn't believe what I was seeing," says Robert, 57, a health writer in Washington, W.V. "For up to six days a week, I was so achy, overwhelmed, and exhausted that I was laid flat out in bed."

Like 29.5 million Americans (75 percent of them women), Robert suffers from migraine headaches, which can begin with a dull ache, then become pounding pain in the temples and the sides of the head. Luckily, Robert found effective treatment: anti-seizure, antidepressant, and hypertension drugs, plus medications to reduce fluid buildup at the top of her spine.

How can you tell whether your headache is a temporary annoyance, or is, like Robert's migraine problem, a serious health condition? As the United States marks National Headache Awareness Week (June 5-11), here's how to gauge and treat the hurt in your head.

Headaches are considered medical emergencies—and merit an immediate call to 911—if they are accompanied by severe dizziness, fever, shortness of breath, or slurred speech. These symptoms could signal something serious, such as a heart attack, stroke, or brain aneurysm.

Headaches are usually considered minor when they are triggered by small, passing problems: drinking too little

water (dehydration) or too much alcohol (which can dehydrate the body and restrict blood flow to the head); skipping meals (which can cause blood sugar to drop and trigger head pain); slumping (which can cause painful spasms in the head or neck muscles); and eyestrain (which develops when you stare too long and hard at a book or computer screen).

Nearly everyone experiences minor headaches at some point," says Anna Calhoun, M.D., co-founder of the Carolina Headache Institute in Chapel Hill, N.C. "But some types of headaches are persistent." Chronic types can include

CLUSTER HEADACHES exceptionally painful and typically striking just one side of the head (where one eye may become bloodshot or one nostril may begin to run)

HORMONE-RELATED HEADACHES affecting 60 percent of women during their menstrual periods, when the body's level of the hormone estrogen drops and causes a chemical reaction that leads to a headache (this type of headache often stops during the second and third trimester of pregnancy, when estrogen levels are elevated)

MIGRAINES marked by throbbing, nausea, sensitivity to light and noise, and, in 15 percent of cases, an aura (visual hallucination that manifests just before an attack)

SINUS HEADACHES caused by the inflammation or blockage of a sinus passage in the nasal cavity; sometimes accompanied by a stuffed-up feeling and possible infection and fever

TENSION HEADACHES usually linked to anxiety, anger, fatigue, and stress and

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

arked by sore temples and tightening
ound the head and in the neck muscles

thing from any of the above? Follow
e basic rules of headache treatment:
t more rest, drink more water, and
ke over-the-counter nonsteroidal anti-
inflammatory drugs (such as aspirin or
uprofen). "If the problem is persistent
debilitating, make an appointment
th your doctor," says Calhoun. "You
ay also want to find a headache doctor
ho is recommended by the National
eadache Foundation or the United
ouncil for Neurologic Subspecialties."

To help peg the source of your prob-
m, your doctor may recommend that
ou keep a headache diary and record
hat foods, sounds, smells, and circum-
stances trigger pain for you.

To treat headaches, your MD may
escribe barbiturates, opiates, ergots
muscle relaxants); or triptans (which
nstrict the blood vessels and moderate
hemical reactions in the brain). To ward
f future attacks, he or she may also
ve you antidepressants, antiepileptic
edications, beta-blockers, or calcium
annel blockers.

Some prescription remedies are head-
he-type specific, such as oxygen therapy
or cluster headaches); Botox injections
the forehead (for migraines); low-dose
rth control pills (for migraines that are
lated to hormone levels); and antibiot-
s, antihistamines, and decongestants
or sinus headaches).

Temples still thundering? Want to
ach for more meds? Doctors say you

should resist this temptation because it
could only make your suffering worse.
If you take more pain medication than
the label advises, the drugs may back-
fire and you may develop what is called
"rebound headache," when medication
not only fails to relieve your pain, but
can actually start to trigger it.

You can make lifestyle changes that
will help keep your headaches in check.
Each day, be sure to eat healthy meals,
get 30 minutes of moderate-intensity
exercise, and drink eight eight-ounce
glasses of water.

Most importantly, rest up. Studies
show you can relieve chronic headache
pain by getting eight hours of sleep every
night.

If you want to try alternative head-
ache remedies, your option include acu-
puncture (the insertion of fine needles
into the skin at specific points); acupres-
sure (the application of finger pressure
at specific points); biofeedback (electric
monitoring of the pulse, heart rate, and
breathing); herbal medicine (remedies
such as feverfew, skullcap, peppermint,
or ginkgo); and yoga (stretching exer-
cises that can loosen clenched muscles,
relieve stress, and improve blood flow to
the head).

"Headache pain can affect everything
from your job performance to your per-
sonal relationships," says Calhoun. "But
when you find the right remedies, the
ache will no longer rule your life." 🌸

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com) lives in New York City. Her work has appeared
in *Women's eNews*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Ms.*



FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Headache Foundation
www.headaches.org

United Council for Neurologic
Subspecialties: "Headache Medicine"
[www.ucns.org/go/subspecialty/
headache](http://www.ucns.org/go/subspecialty/headache)



LET US PRAY

Create in Us, O God!

by Julie K. Aageson

In the two short weeks

before Christmas last year, both of my parents died. The long journeys of their living and dying came to a close, leaving us all with a sense of *what now?* A sense of physical and mental exhaustion. Of being stuck. Of not knowing what comes next. And of almost unbearable sorrow.

We knew the depth of our sorrow by the way it ate into us, in waking and sleeping.

As I write today, it's still winter. The days are short and dark and it's a time better suited for laments than thinking about renewal. Lent is just around the corner and I'm still sorting out grief and loss. Perhaps a nudge about spiritual health and well-being is timely.

"Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome. Stay with us now for it is evening and the day is almost over. Let your light scatter the darkness and shine within your people here." These familiar words and their haunting melody from Holden Evening Prayer never fail to buoy my sagging spirit. Recognizing darkness and preoccupation with ourselves, they proclaim the light of Christ and show us new life. Create in us, O God!

A note arrives from a friend who lives in the Palestinian Territories. In it, the words of Viola Raheb describe the lives of so many Palestinian Christians there: "...my work has taught me to hope where others are resigned, to build where others destroy, to affirm life where death rules." With truly remarkable determination and faith, Raheb reminds

us that our God brings life in the midst of death and hopefulness in the face of resignation. Create in us, O God!

In the aftermath of the deaths caused by an anguished young man in Tucson, Ariz., last winter, President Obama spoke about suffering and senseless loss. He did so without blame, rising above partisan finger-pointing to call us to our best selves, inviting us to see what we have in common, what we hope for, and how all of us can be "life-bearers." Sharing our common hope and longing for wholeness is renewing and restoring. Create in us, O God!

In the renewal of the earth that comes with spring and summer, the spirit of expectation and *joie de vivre* is tangible. The very air we breathe seems to pulsate with new life and vitality. Colors are more vivid, smells more pungent, dramatic light more brilliant. God's creation seems fresh and new again, and we creatures of the earth know ourselves to be part of this generative, creative renewal and rebirth. Create in us, O God!

I am still mourning and the losses are just as real. But I treasure this time of the year for all the ways God seems so present. The darkness *has* been scattered. God's spirit does shine within God's people. God's spirit *is* renewed within us. Create in us, O God, and may this season be one of restoration and renewal for us all! 🌿

Julie K. Aageson is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.



E RECOMMEND

Resources for action, advocacy, programs, or further study

Compiled from sources including
ELCA News Service. Seeds for
Parish, and www.elca.org

Bible study resources available at new site

Women of the ELCA Bible study resources are available at www.elca.org/resources rather than on the Augsburg Fortress site. You will need to set up an account on the site before ordering. Once on the site, search for ELCAWO to find all Women of the ELCA resources. You may also call 800-638-3522, ext. 2580, to place an order over the phone.

Support a cause; share your skills

Many women regularly make quilts and assemble kits for Lutheran World Relief. Have you thought of sharing your arts and crafts skills in other ways, supporting other causes?

Craft Hope: Handmade Crafts for a Cause by Jade Sims (Lark Crafts, 2010) can get you started. This fun-for-the-eyes book includes 32 projects—from pillowcase dresses to soft cloth dolls—that support the efforts of an equal number of charities, both here and overseas. Most projects come with additional suggestions of those who might benefit from the project.

Between the opening section “Crafting Hope with Care” and the 32 different projects, you could develop a plan for learning about and discerning particular needs in your community, adapt one of these projects or create your own, and be on your way to a new service project. Women of all ages in your congregation could join in this new service project as together you care for your neighbors.

Get the book at your local or online bookstores like www.amazon.com.

2011 Churchwide Assembly set for August 15-19

Every two years, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America gathers for a churchwide assembly. Voting members, ecumenical and global guests, ministry partners, visitors and congregational observers from across this church will gather in Orlando, Fla., August 15–19, 2011, for the 12th churchwide assembly of the ELCA.

The opening service of worship will be held on Monday, August 15, 2011, at 4 p.m. Hearings and workshops will take place on Monday prior to the first plenary session.

In a week grounded in daily worship and Bible study focused around “life in the community of the baptized,” participants will consider the recommendations from “Living into the Future Together: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA.”

Other items on the assembly’s schedule include consideration of a proposal for the ELCA Malaria Campaign, response to memorials received from synods and resolutions from the assembly, and the budget for the upcoming 2012–2013 biennium. Constitutional amendments related to “Living into the Future Together” as well as the redesign of the churchwide organization, and a social statement on genetics will also be discussed.

Visitors are welcome for the entire assembly or for individual days. Congregations may send an official observer. Visit www.elca.org/assembly for more information.

BREAKING and remaking

by Martha E. Stortz



WHAT'S YOUR CHANGE QUOTIENT (CQ)?

Are you change-averse? Or change-seeking?

Do you live by routines? Or do you live to try the latest new gadget? Or cereal? Or iPhone app?

How about the CQs of the people you live with?

Do they fall into a compatible range?



households that spread across the CQ spectrum only survive with a good sense of humor. Once upon a morning, my late husband suggested pancakes for breakfast, instead of our usual yogurt, and I suddenly found myself white-knuckling the breakfast table: "Pancakes?!? Now?!?" He calmly replied: "Well, we could wait until dinner." We both had to laugh.

The two of us covered both extremes on the CQ spectrum. A

lover of pattern and paisley, I held down the "Change? No way!" end. In contrast, he hovered nearer the opposite end: "Change for the Sake of Change." He was ready to reach for the latest recipe, vintage, or style as elixirs against dull predictability. Yet, when sudden illness shattered the sunny pattern of our lives, we couldn't choose change. Change chose us. We could only choose whether change would renew or destroy us. Sometimes even that choice was beyond us.

How could we dare hope that change led to renewal and not destruction? Simultaneously simple and mysterious, the answer lies in God's own change, "emptying himself" to become one of us (Philippians 2:7). Jesus seals God's promise that change leads to renewal—not destruction. Incarnation is God's change; resurrection, God's renewal.

The journey of discipleship unpacks those convictions, for Christian discipleship is following Jesus, God's promise in the flesh. The truth of God's promise can't be argued; it can only be lived. Here are some things to look for along the way.

Your starting point

Whether you choose change—or change chooses you—it's helpful to know where you're starting from. Knowing your tolerance for change helps. On one hand, the change-

averse find it hard to change habits, even bad ones. There's the story of a man long imprisoned in the Tower of London and suddenly pardoned by a new monarch. The door to his cell opened, but the man regarded the threshold uncertainly: "I know what this side is like, but what lies beyond I know not." Change was too threatening, and he chose to stay with the familiar, even if it imprisoned him.

At other times, the familiar liberates, issuing an invitation to live life close to the bone. Living deep into the familiar can move us beyond merely looking. When I visit her, I watch my mother watching birds. Crippled by arthritis, she spends her days moving from chair to chair, and one of them turns toward the window. She studies the birds, distinguishing different species, and even knows the mourning dove that lost its partner. As I watch her watching, I realize that she's captured that combination of awe and attention that constitute *regard*.

Isn't this what the pregnant Mary discovers, when she suddenly catches a glimpse of herself from a God's-eye-view? She marvels that God even notices her: "For he has *regarded* the low estate of his handmaid..." (Luke 1:48, KJV). And this pregnant woman's song only echoes another. When Hagar realizes she has seen the face of the God of Israel—and lived, she responds

with wonder: "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" (Genesis 16:13, NRSV) Change-averse by circumstance, these women, like the elderly, are living lessons in the divine art of attention. Through them, we learn how God *regards* us.

On the other hand, change-seekers break out of habits more easily, sometimes good ones. "She had everything going for her! How could she do this?" one friend confided about another who'd fallen in love, left her marriage, and moved to the other side of the country. She left us stunned; yet, we knew her restlessness. We missed that mad-cap energy, even as we prayed she would find a place to rest, somehow, somewhere, and with someone. Did she even have the capacity to choose what would give her the solace she sought? From across the centuries, Augustine's observation struck home: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions* 1.1).

In the Bible study story this month, we can almost hear Nathan shouting at David: "You have everything going for you! How could you do this?!" David's restless search for new options, even and especially under pressure, made him a brilliant military commander and a shrewd monarch, but threatened to unmoor him. Long thought to be David's own, the words of Psalm 51 repent of a restless heart: "Create

in me a clean heart, O God..." Put simply, David begs God: "Don't leave it up to me."

Choosing—and being chosen

David the king, the woman who left everything behind: They had the power to choose change. Lots of people don't. Both Hagar and Mary find themselves in pregnancies they might not want, impregnated by someone they did not choose. Their consent comes after the fact. People like David and our friend have the power to create facts.

Tony Kushner's brilliant musical, *Caroline, or Change*, probes the limits of the power to change and be changed. Set in a Jewish household in Louisiana in the 1960s, the plot plays on the meaning of the word *change*. Initially, *change* refers to the spare coins 8-year-old Noah Gellman leaves in his pockets for the family's black maid to find. Hoping to alter this behavior, Noah's new stepmother decrees that anything found in Noah's pants belongs to their maid.

Then Noah starts deliberately leaving money in his pockets. Partly, he considers Caroline his friend because she comforted him as his mother died of cancer. Partly he fantasizes himself a hero in Caroline's life. Then a \$20 bill surfaces in the laundry. An argument ensues, and their relationship dissolves. Caroline bitterly concludes that

they "weren't never friends" to begin with. Certainly, Noah exercises a power to make or break relationships that she, a maid, does not have.

But *change* also refers to the tectonic cultural shifts beyond every character's control. None of the characters can change the assassinations of Medgar Evers and John F. Kennedy, the Civil Rights movement, or the war in Vietnam. Moreover, all of them live on the periphery of the dominant culture: Caroline, because she is black, a single mother, and a maid; the Gellmans, because they are Jewish and her employers. Finally, *change* refers to forces beyond everyone's control, powers looming over all of them. At the end of the play, Caroline concludes she and Noah could never be friends, but simply people "who learn how to lose things."

The message underneath the musical, though, is less bleak. This "story behind the story" is Kushner's own. He grew up in the South in the 60s. If *Caroline, or Change* is autobiographical in the least, it demonstrates that even in unavoidable circumstances, where all the choices seem stolen, there is a place to pivot from.

A basketball player looks like she is surrounded by guards, no teammate to turn to, no pass to make. Then from nowhere, a straight shot to the basket appears

he pivots—and shoots. This play may be Kushner's straight shot, wherein he claims the only power he has: the power to tell the story. He offers one that telegraphs the real world without sentiment or excuses, but with compassion and generosity. Loss births his story.

Our loss's blessing

Loss is a necessary ingredient in change. After my husband died, I would have eaten pancakes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, had he only been there to make them. But the empty space at the table screamed his absence. Instead of eating, I started walking, making my way to the village every morning before the light came up. At first, I invented destinations: banking, shopping, coffee. Finally, it hit me: "You don't need a reason: just keep walking." And so I did, leaning into the loveliness of early morning. In time, the habit took me along other paths of incomparable beauty. Who would have guessed gift could come from such absence?

In *The Holy Longing*, author Ronald Rolheiser writes of "letting your loss bless you." Blessing doesn't come easily or quickly. It took those 40 days between Easter and the Ascension for the disciples to get used to the absence of Jesus and the presence of the risen Christ. But they had that time to get used to life in the Resurrection Zone.

Change shatters the familiar. Every change leaves behind breakage, and it takes time to pick up the pieces, regard each one, and wait until each piece finds its way into a new pattern. Even today, in a new position in a new part of the country, the ache of loss both accompanies me and blesses me.

The stories of David and Hagar confirm that loss leads to renewal. Sarah's insecurities govern Hagar's life, but at least as a house servant, she can count on shelter and food. Freedom from bondage means fending for herself and her son with only the promise of an angel for support. In the end, the promise of an angel comes true: Her son becomes the father of a vast and powerful nomadic tribe. King David repents elaborately when he understands his offense against God; yet, the first child of his union with Bathsheba falls ill and dies. Out of that grief he builds a new relationship with his wife and his God; Solomon is their blessing. Finally, loss blesses, leading to renewal.

The story of God's change

Once opened to this mystery, we find it everywhere. The whole creation tells a story of breaking and remaking. Light breaks away from darkness—night from day, sun from moon and all stars, earth from sky and sea. Eve breaks out of Adam's rib cage. Not surprisingly, breaking

and remaking is at the heart of God's new creation. The apostle Thomas sniffed out this mystery. Because he demanded tangible proof, we know there were wounds on the body of the risen Christ. We can believe that loss leads to renewal—and not destruction. We participate in that mystery whenever we receive the "Body of Christ, broken for you." Out of such brokenness, we receive new life.

Change lies at the heart of Christianity, not just any change but change for renewal. The voice from the throne utters the beautiful and terrible truth: "See, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5 Isaiah 65:17, 66:22). To the change-averse, these words promise that change *will* happen. It can neither be denied nor buried. To the change-seeking, they warn that we can't dictate the terms: *I not you* make all things new.

God's change offers all of us the consolation we crave, for God's change leads to renewal and not destruction. God seals that promise by becoming one of us to point us unswervingly toward renewal. Incarnation is God's change, and resurrection is God's renewal. Let us go out with good courage. 🌿

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FAMILY MATTERS

Chocolate, Mocha, and Almond

by Sue Gamelin

"Finally in our family

there is someone else brown!" My grandson Bryce, then 6 years old, announced this with a sigh. We were in Uganda, where 2-year-old Brianne had just been scooped up into his arms and the arms of Bryce's brother and sister, mom and dad—and grandma. This beautiful little chocolate-colored girl, abandoned by her family for reasons we'll never know, became the newest Gamelin last summer. "Someone else brown."

Bryce had been part of our family since he was a baby. His mocha-colored skin was a gift from his Sri Lankan parents, the birth mother who had given him up for adoption, and the birth father who had disappeared. What color are the other members of Bryce's adoptive nuclear family? Northern European and American Indian genes have made them lovely shades of beige and tan and wheat, all sorts of light browns. But not the shades of brown that Bryce was thinking about. No chocolate and mocha.

A few years back my dad's cousin, then in his 80s, made his own announcement at a family dinner. "Isn't it wonderful that everyone in our family is white," he said and smiled broadly. An embarrassed silence was the response from those who had gathered. No one seconded his motion. Yes, he violated political correctness with his celebration of whiteness. But the offense was even more than that. Those around the table were by and large from the generations below his. We didn't share his enthusiasm for everyone being white, even for

everyone being alike. Instead, we value our increasingly multicultural and multi-racial families and world.

Our family certainly isn't all white. We're not all alike. We celebrate the inclusion of in-laws, nieces and nephews, cousins, children, and grandchildren who are a variety of colors and backgrounds. We have those two with mocha and chocolate-colored skin who were born in Sri Lanka and Uganda. But we also celebrate among us Japanese Americans, Laotian Americans, and Chinese Americans, and the children born to them and their European American husbands and wives. We're a global family, with some of us European Americans acknowledging Saudi Arabia, Argentina, and Sri Lanka (Bryce and Brianne's dad) as our birthplace.

Our family isn't unique. Census data shows an American scene that grows more diverse each decade. In 2000 only 66 percent of us described ourselves as white, without any other racial or ethnic components. During the last decade, 200,000 international adoption visas were issued by the U.S. State Department, with children coming here from dozens of countries around the world. We are told that the fastest growing component of our population is the Latino/Hispanic community, and new statistics from the 2010 U.S. Census have now substantiated that claim.

New categories were added to the 2010 census questionnaire so that we can find ways to describe our increasingly complex racial and ethnic makeup

Maybe we should start using the word *Hapa* that the Hawaiians use to describe those of mixed race.

I grew up in Minnesota. In those days, when Minnesotans used the phrase *mixed marriage*, they meant that a Swede and a Norwegian had married! When my friends J.B. and Mommy married in 1968, he from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and she from South Dakota, they stopped as seldom as possible when they made that long drive from their home in Florida to the Upper Midwest. They feared what would happen if people saw them together. Now many of us count such marriages in our families and communities as normal.

Where do our church families fit into this increasingly diverse picture? The people in our pews and folding chairs should be just as diverse as our society, shouldn't they? Galatians 3:27–28 is a banner that I've been carrying for almost four decades: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ."

Paul wrote these powerful and life-changing words to a community wrestling with whether Christians needed to be all alike. They were asking about the place of the Old Testament law now that Christ

has been scandalously crucified and astonishingly brought back to life. Do new Christians need to become Jews first? Who is part of the true Israel? Should others be kept out?

Paul begins his response to these questions right where he should begin. He takes us back to Abraham, whom God tells in no uncertain terms that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" through him (Genesis 12:3b). Isaiah sees a mountain where all peoples will gather around God's family table (Isaiah 25:6). Jesus heals the daughter of the Canaanite woman



(Matthew 15:21–28), although it takes a good bit of vigorous discussion before that happens. Philip baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–38). Peter has a startling dream that leads him to understand that God shows no partiality, "but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34–35).

Our congregations may not reflect that diversity. According to statistics gathered in 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

America is still more than 95 percent white, in spite of our efforts to be a welcoming church. It isn't easy, is it? We're still learning.

I'm learning, too. When I am with Bryce and Brianne, and their older sister and brother, Bryan and Brittany, I am aware of folks watching us, even as many of them try not to look conspicuous. Others just stare. I can become annoyed about this incursion into our privacy, but then I step back and take a look at us. Yes, diversity is growing in families throughout our nation. But we're still a pretty interesting sight, we people of chocolate-, mocha-, almond-, and wheat-colored skin; black, blond, and grey hair; ages from three to 67! I will be glad when families like ours are such a common site that no one will give them a second glance.

At the same time, I realize that many people take delight in what they see as they watch us. This scene is a foretaste of what God's reign will look like, isn't it. And sound like: "Grandma, grandma," the cries ring out from this quartette of voices, with a "Geema" from Brianne trilling an octave above. My heart swells with thanksgiving as I answer. 🌸

The Rev. Sue Gamelin is a retired ELCA pastor living in North Carolina. She and her husband, Tim, have four grown children and nine grandchildren.

Supporting the Care of Creation

by Emily Hansen



Did you know your congregational unit can participate in our triennial convention offering regardless of whether you are attending the convention? Women of the ELCA has more than 7,000 congregational units but only about 400 delegates go to the triennial convention, which will be in Spokane, Wash., July 12-14. We are making it possible for every unit to contribute to the triennial convention offering because we know how much you care about the ministries it will support.

The 2011 triennial convention offering will be designated as follows: 25 percent to the Evangelical Lutheran Coalition for Mission in Appalachia (ELCMA), 25 percent to ELCA Out-

door Ministries, and 50 percent going to Women of the ELCA ongoing ministries. These designations were made by action of the churchwide executive board and are in response to memorials passed at the seventh triennial convention in 2008 related to environmental issues including environmental stewardship, water consumption, and mountaintop removal mining.

The work of the Evangelical Lutheran Coalition for Mission in Appalachia (ELCMA) focuses on environmental education, advocacy, and care for God's creation. The convention offering designation will support its work in sustainability. The organization is committed to abolishing mountaintop removal





Purpose Statement of Women of the ELCA

As a community of women
created in the image of God,
called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and
empowered by the Holy Spirit,
we commit ourselves to
grow in faith,
affirm our gifts,

support one another in our callings,
engage in ministry and action, and
promote healing and wholeness
in the church,
the society, and
the world.

strip mining and replacing it with more sustainable energy sources. The organization also advocates for the production and consumption of locally grown foods sustaining local farms and contributing to a more affordable and sustainable lifestyle, as well as clean water which sustains all life.

ELCA Outdoor Ministries is also focused on environmental education and creation stewardship. Each year, ELCA-affiliated outdoor ministry organizations serve almost 450,000 children, youth, and adults in summer camp and retreat settings in a wide spectrum of year-round programs. As part

of their mission to be centers for Christian discipleship, they have a tremendous responsibility to be leaders and role models of environmental stewardship for the whole church.

The designation from the convention offering to ELCA Outdoor Ministries will fund a special grant program to encourage the development of new and innovative initiatives in environmental stewardship in ELCA outdoor ministry programs around the country.

By contributing to the convention offering, your unit will be making a difference for these amazing projects. The organizations need

your help in the stewarding of and caring for God's creation. Make your check out to Women of the ELCA and write "Eighth Triennial Convention Offering" in the memo line of your check.

Mail your offering to the churchwide office at the address below and your congregational unit's gift will then be publicly recognized during the convention in Spokane.


Mail to:

Women of the ELCA

P.O. Box 71256

Chicago, IL 60694

Emily Hansen is director for stewardship, Women of the ELCA.





Time for a Tune-Up

We take better care of our cars than we do of ourselves. Consider this: Every 3,000 miles we change the oil, every 5,000 miles we rotate tires, balancing them every other rotation. We tune up our cars before a road trip, and we are familiar with our car's sounds and know when there are strange ones. We have no such maintenance routine for our bodies and souls.

We often fail to listen to our bodies. For example, we might eat, thinking what we want is food when we're really hungry for connection. What's a woman to do? Can we learn to care for this gift God has given us?

We face obstacles—most of which we put up ourselves. “I don’t have enough time for self-care.” “It’s selfish and indulgent.” “I have others whose needs must come before mine.” We can think of dozens of excuses. As the Bible study leaders remind us, “we often seek to be responsible first and ‘renewed’ afterward—if there is time for it,” just like Martha (Luke 10:38–42) or the elder son (Luke 15:11–32).

So first we have to believe that it’s OK to spend time on renewal. For starters we might remember that God spent six days creating and one resting. That’s



gh bar for some of us. Jesus often pulled away from the crowds, too, so he could pray and be renewed (Mark 6:46; Matthew 14:23). Years ago one church leader advised a group of us, “Come apart before you come apart.” Sound advice, I’d say.

Tending relationships

Let’s begin with God’s intention for us. We see throughout Scripture that God wants good for God’s people. In Jeremiah 29:11 we read, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and

not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” And in Deuteronomy 30:19: “...I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life....”

What is the *shalom* of God and how might we experience it? The Hebrew word *shalom* encompasses the sense of well-being, wholeness, peace, that comes in relationship—our relationship with God, Christ, self, and others. *Shalom* is something far deeper than contentment or happiness. Truly it’s “the peace that passes understanding.”

Tending our relationships constitutes an important piece of well-being and renewal. Do you set aside time with God? Regular quiet time for meditation and prayer? Find a time, place and method that works for you. I find that I need to change my spiritual practices from time to time because what I needed last year isn’t what feeds my spirit now. Sometimes I need a devotional book to give me structure and insights. Other times, I need to focus solely on Scripture and prayer. And for me, journaling is a way I have conversations with God.

Often I’ve used a spiritual discipline called *examen*, and at day’s end I reflect on and pray about a question such as one of these: What gifts have I received today for which I can be thankful? Where has God been working in my life today? Where was I cooperating with God today? How will God’s help guide me through tomorrow?

Relationships with others are also an important part of renewal—loved ones, family and friends, our faith community, those who need our help, and all those to whom we hear God’s call to serve. And don’t forget to look at the relationship you have with yourself. Do you befriend yourself? Or are you hard on yourself? We often neglect that part of Jesus’ command to us in Mark 12:30–31: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” And then the part we often reverse: “You shall love your neighbor as

yourself." If we do not love ourselves, we are unable to fully love our neighbor.

Consider the signs that we don't love ourselves and the signs that we're due for some renewal and self-care: We become irritable, quick to anger, mean-spirited, envious. We live in fear and with a sense of scarcity rather than abundance. What happens when we live in God's *shalom*, when we know ourselves to be beloved of God? Our hearts open up with a sense of spacious-

ness and graciousness; we are more able to be channels for God's love in Christ to flow through us and out to our neighbor, whoever our neighbor might be.

Are you in tune with what you need for renewal and self-care? As the Bible study authors point out, we need different things at different times. Sometimes you need quiet, and other times you need to get active. It's important to know your inner and outer rhythms and develop a tool kit of renewal and self-care resources.

TOOL KIT RESOURCE

HERE ARE A FEW RESOURCES
FOR YOUR TOOL KIT:

- **Quiet time and conversation with God.** If you don't do well with sitting quietly, you might find prayer-walking or walking a labyrinth more to your liking. Or use exercise time to talk with God and to pray.

- **Time for your other relationships.** Do you need to schedule lunch with friends? An overnight with your grandchildren? A getaway with your partner? Volunteer time in a hospital, animal shelter, or soup kitchen? A renewed commitment to your Women of the ELCA group or folks in your congregation?

- **Naps.** What a lovely gift to give yourself. And sometimes just what the doctor ordered.

- **Workshops and retreats.** If you don't find an existing one that appeals to you, check the online resources offered by Women of the ELCA that your women's group, a group of friends, or you alone could easily use

to schedule a one-day or weekend retreat. If you do it alone, just plan a mini-retreat in your home, or make a reservation at a local retreat center. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org and click on "Program Resources for You and Your Women's Group" on the left-hand side.

- **Books.** Libraries and bookstores are filled with meditation and inspirational books. One of my recent favorites is Dawna Markova's *I Will Not Die an Unlived Life*. Another is Jan L. Richardson's *Sacred Journeys: A Woman's Book of Daily Prayer*.
- **Art.** Visit an art gallery; let the creativity of others restore you and speak to your soul.
- **A spiritual director, counselor, or life coach.** After I lost my job of 22 years, a life coach helped me talk through the multiple losses and grieve them—and then he helped me create new dreams and give them

wings. These encounters entail a creative process that can effectively move us forward when we confront life's speed bumps.

- **Exercise.** Again, find what works for you. Don't bypass it because you only have 10 or 15 minutes a day. Simply being more active today than you were yesterday accomplishes several things. It reduces your stress, keeps you fit, and often spurs creative juices. Yoga and walking are wonderful ways to strengthen your body and reduce stress.
- **Sleep.** Experts say most Americans are sleep-deprived. We differ in our sleep needs, but be sure you get what you need so you can operate at your peak and open up more fully to what's inside and around you.
- **Good food.** God meant food for our delight as well as for fuel. Fill your plate with color and savor each bite. Notice and appreciate taste, texture,

nce you are tuned in to your body and your spirit, you'll be aware of what's needed for you to be all God created you to be. You can then go to your resource toolbox (see below) and select from your own menu.

The Bible study authors ask us to think about what kind of renewal we need now. Sometimes we need to shake things up and get moving. Other times we need to slow down and create quiet space. For what do you yearn? Once you decide, select something from your

resource toolbox. You'll help yourself—and you'll serve as a good model for your children, grandchildren, family, and friends.

Let yourself live in God's *shalom*. God wants no less for you. 🌿

Sonia Solomonson is a life coach with Way2Grow Coaching and writes and edits from her home in Streamwood, Ill. The mother of three and grandmother of eight, she constantly adds to her self-care resource toolbox.

smell, flavor. Reflect on the food's source and what it took to reach your table. I highly recommend reading the book *Food for Life* by L. Shannon Jung (Augsburg Fortress, 2004) to discover a new perspective on God's gift of food.

Live in gratitude. My gratitude journal helps me to stop, notice, and give thanks for all God has given me.

Sabbath time. I call this "white space" in my life. Have you ever looked at a magazine page that's jammed with text? It's exhausting. Notice the difference when you view a page that includes lots of white space. We need that in our lives, too. Take a break from your work. A day off. A weekend getaway with your partner or friends. A vacation. A wellness day.

Massages, facials, manicures, pedicures. Care for our physical bodies can renew us in ways not always

possible by other methods. It's OK to tend to our bodies—God's temple and God's gift to us.

- **Let go.** I'm the first to admit it's not easy but it is so good for us. Just let go of anger, hurts, negative messages, old ways of being that no longer serve you (if they ever did). This can also include letting go of the "stuff" of those we love. A spiritual director once told me to carry those I love in my heart—but not to carry "their stuff," their issues and problems. There is a difference. Care for yourself enough to let go and let God.
- **Forgive**—and accept the forgiveness of God and of others. Find ways to let God's healing love do its work in your life.
- **Keep positive.** You may have heard the story credited to Cherokee Indians in which a grandfather tells his grandson about the good wolf and the bad wolf warring inside him.

The good wolf represents peace, love, and kindness while the bad wolf includes jealousy, hatred, and negativity. When the grandson asks which wolf will win the inner war, the grandfather wisely responds, "The one I feed."

- **Vocational changes.** Examine your work life to see whether it's life-giving. Ask, too, whether you're bringing light and life into the workplace or whether you might be part of sapping the energy of colleagues. What might you do to bring more of God's light and love into the workplace? Are there things you can change? Do you need to think about a job change or even career change?
- **Volunteer.** If what you need is to get active and be involved, dozens of organizations desperately need help. So many possibilities exist.
- **Reach out** to help a friend or neighbor.



A Hard Truth

by Kim L. Beckmann

The truth will set you free... but first it will make you miserable.

I always wondered how many sleepless nights and awakening nights it took for Nathan to come with his elegant “you are the man” judgment for King David (2 Samuel 12). Then how many days did it take to screw up the courage to walk to the palace and confront David, knowing what David had proven himself capable of and the risks his truth-telling posed? And how long did it take before David was able to move through personal shame and the shambles around him to risk grasping the promise of renewal for his nation?

When it comes to these situations in my own life, an old bumper sticker comes to mind: “The truth will set you free... but first it will make you miserable.” Whether it’s truth to power (a person in high authority) or to friend, family, or lover, the revealing encounter that creates new life usually doesn’t come without some kind of pain.

Granted, in the encounter I’m about to share, I was the one who

had placed the call to my friend looking for just this sort of truthfulness. But I really thought he would back me up in my judgment.

Bob had been my truth-telling friend for 25 years. I’d had my first experience of his bracing agitation one day when he’d informed me that my snarly bad mood wasn’t attractive. He held up a big mirror that helped me see myself the way the world saw me. Then it was up to me to decide what to do with what I saw.

I had placed a call to my friend because I was hopping mad that someone in church leadership wasn’t honoring the resurrection of our Lord! I was upset about an Easter season Sunday worship service that celebrated the gift of ourselves over the remembrance that Jesus had died and was risen. I addressed my issues with the powers that be and had gotten no satisfaction. I was going to leave in a huff unless they restored the resurrection to its place of importance immediately.

When you leave the dressing room to ask your friend if the outfit you’re trying on makes your hips look big, you hope the answer is “No, of course not” even though you fear the opposite. In this phone call to Bob I hoped a) to be affirmed that my outrage on behalf of the resurrection was righteous, and b) my desire to deliver the truth of righteousness and then pick up my toys and go home if I didn’t prevail would be supported.

Bob listened to my rant for a while. But as I wound down, he brought a good judgment on me instead. He didn’t bring it in the form of a story like Nathan did to David, but in a question.

My friend asked me if I thought my own approach actually did preach the resurrection. If I was so worried about defending Easter, did my own tone of voice, my words, my feelings toward the people involved bear witness to Easter’s new life, hope, and promise? As he figuratively put his arm

around me in love for all concerned and held out the mirror, I saw: “You are the man.”

I hate exposing this side of myself. I tell you this story, though, because it gets to the heart of the renewal that truth-telling can bring. I put it out to you because it clarifies the heart of any truth-telling relationship.

A RIGHT SPIRIT

Once I saw the log in my own eye I was more able to address the speck in my brothers’ and sisters’ eyes. With a right spirit, I approached the conflict without threats, fear, and defensiveness (otherwise known as huffing and puffing). I let Easter’s new life rise to the surface of my skin and meet the world God loves even in its imperfection, even as God loves me. The risk in truth-telling, in love, not only freed me for wholehearted participation no matter the result, but opened community discussion about our expression of Easter life and joy.

Sometimes, in interactions with Bob and other truth-tellers in my life, I defend myself a little longer than I did this time. I have to wrangle myself into opening the eyes of my heart to my blind spots. My friend leaves me (in love) to stew on it. And sometimes, the friend I trust most to risk bringing good judgment to me is wrong. I reserve the right to soul search.

I take the risk to confront others most fearlessly when I true it up to the power of love, life, and renewal in the community of faith. I speak the truth in love to others most eloquently when I’ve opened my own heart to a “right spirit.” Judge not, and you won’t be judged. But when you have opened yourself to the good judgment of a community rooted in Jesus, you may have good judgment to bring. To quote author David Foster Wallace’s twist: “The truth will set you free. But not until it is finished with you.”

A RENEWING WATER

I live in the Midwest now, home of what some call “Minnesota nice.” We’re not known for confrontation, though sometimes I wonder if that’s just a nice way to describe passive aggression. Even if you weren’t raised here, you know what our mothers have taught us about not saying anything at all, if we can’t say something nice. As women, we often feel the culture rewards us for niceness. We may feel more comfortable with healing and soothing words; less with calling others into accountability. But we are also disciples of Jesus. Jesus was a practiced and elegant truth-teller who didn’t confuse niceness and love.

The woman who meets Jesus at the well isn’t nice (John 4). He asks her for water. She ladles up a hard time for him about the truth

of the many cultural points of strain on their relationship. He says the truth goes deeper than that: he has living, ever-renewing water for her. She calls his bluff and asks for the goods. But the goods of the truth have for her go still deeper. He invites her to bring her husband along. When she glosses things over, saying she doesn’t have one, Jesus isn’t nice. Right, Jesus acknowledges. The truth is you’ve had a bunch of them. The guy you’re with now isn’t healthy for you, either.

**Come and see this man
who has told me . . .**

The woman recognizes at once the prophetic turn of Jesus’ truth-telling. She presses back and challenges one of the other big issues between them—where God lives and should be worshipped. Jesus tells her the truth: God is doing a new thing. A thing which breaks old divisions and restores the people of God. A thing which (beside the fact that he is the Messiah whom they have *all* been waiting for) gives them standing to have this kind of truth-telling between them.

The woman at the well has this good judgment brought on her personal issues. And since much

what we think of as personal involves a community, we shouldn't be surprised at where she takes this counter—to her community. She receives the ability to renew her own life and relationships by risking the truth with her neighbors. "Come and see this man who has told me everything I have ever done!"

The woman at the well receives new life in her community by acknowledging the brokenness through which she received renewing truth. Perhaps because of her brokenness, they seek the possibility too. New life might come for them, Samaritans, a people rejected by the Judeans as outside the circle of God's love and salvation.

HEALING WORD

Maybe Jesus himself came to know his role in this life-giving plan more clearly through the truth-telling of another woman, this time from Galilee. The Gospel of Matthew (9:1-13; 23:23-28) tells the story of this bold woman crossing gender, race, and religious lines of the times to risk for the life of her mentally ill daughter. Jesus isn't nice. He ignores her. She isn't nice either. She keeps after him. She doesn't just quietly disappear.

Finally, Jesus tells her the healing he brings isn't for her and her hostile community: only for Israel. Undeterred, she takes it up a notch, challenges Jesus some more. "Really?"

Is that the nature of the kingdom you've come to proclaim? Really?" She kneels. "Dog? Really? Then give me the crumbs it is." But she still insists: Help me!

Her daughter is healed. That may seem personal. But Jesus—who in this challenging exchange may have expanded his own grasp of the kingdom of God, his mission, and the nature of faith—now proclaims a grace-filled truth for all.

In the Bible study session this month, David does not learn the will of God for himself and the nation apart from the community who confronts him in the prophet, Nathan. Jesus, in his own prophetic ministry, starts what we like to call "hard sayings" with words like, "I tell you the truth" over 50 times in the gospels.

Jesus confronts Peter's mistaken confidence. He "truly tells" Peter that in the darkness of fear he would deny Jesus three times before the sun came up, and so opens the door for future renewal of Peter's call.

Of the impoverished, unnoticed woman offering her mite at the temple, Jesus turns to his disciples and says, truly this poor widow has offered more than all of them.

He hears the story of the man lying beside the healing pool. He wants Jesus' pity. But he also wants judgment on the people and circumstances he believes have left him just short of the chance for restored life.

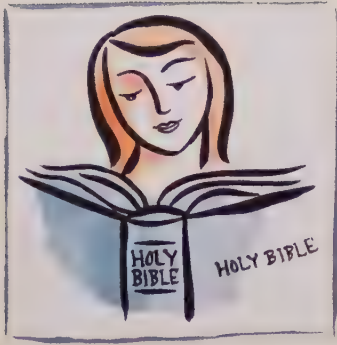
Instead of the sympathy he expects, Jesus asks him the renewing and challenging question, "Do you *want* to be healed?"

The true healing is up to him if he can grasp it in Jesus' challenge: "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk." When the Pharisees hear about this and criticize Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, he answers that truly God raises the dead and gives life where God pleases, entrusting all judgment to him, God's child.

Jesus says these things, risks these truths, in love. He takes this risk for these people mentioned in Scripture, but beyond them to the renewal of the whole human family. Jesus risks, suffers, and dies for the sake of this truth, for the true life of Easter, and for our transformed lives. As disciples we are called to follow.

As bold women we come to the well for the renewal Jesus brings. We kneel before the Word and Bread of Life for strength to challenge and change, to be changed and challenged. We come to the word, font, and table not alone, but as a community praying for the right spirit and clear hearts, true to love of God and neighbor. We rise, made free to live and bring good news. 🌿

The Rev. Dr. Kim L. Beckmann is an ELCA pastor. She is author of *Prepare a Road! Preaching Vocation, Community Voice, Marketplace Vision* and contributor to *New Procurement Commentary*. She lives in Chicago with her husband, also an ELCA pastor.



BIBLE STUDY

by Catherine Malotky
and David Engelstad

RENEW

The cloud of witnesses surrounding us can teach us much about what it means to bring your best self to the life you've been given. This Bible study will invite us into the dynamic web of life anchored by "renew, respond, and rejoice." This is a vocation in the richest sense of that term—who are you and how are you called to service in a world full of surprises? There is so much to do. How do we stay spiritually healthy in the face of overwhelming need?

Getting Unstuck: Renewing Hardness of Heart

Key verse

Psalm 51:10–12

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Materials you will need

- Journal
- Bible
- *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW, the red book) or *Lutheran Book of Worship* (LBW, the green book)
- Leader Guide on page 34

Beginning

READ PSALM 51:10–12 ALOUD.

1. In your journal, recall at least one time in your life when you could or did offer this

prayer on your own behalf. What was at stake for you? What did you hope your own renewal would accomplish?

2. Where have you heard these words before? Where do you remember using them in the liturgy? (See ELW 185–188. Note that in LBW this psalm was used as the offertory in services without communion.)

Set the stage

The words of Psalm 51 are ascribed to King David, remembering a time when his spirit was deeply troubled and he felt ashamed. He had experienced renewal—painful yet powerful—and made his story-psalm public so that others might learn from it. The church has been using David's words in its worship and confessions ever since. Maybe you have uttered them too...at a time when you felt guilty, indifferent, defiant, or empty. Calling out these words of Psalm 51 does not immediately accomplish our renewal.

it it does announce our desire for and intention to pursue it. And it signals our awareness that renewal is what we need.

In this session, we will explore the creative tension between renewal and challenge.

Critical questions to keep in mind as you study:

How do I know when and what kind of renewal I need?

How can I renew myself when so many others depend on me?

Who benefits from my renewal?

Learning from the saints

King David's witness

In the story of King David in 2 Samuel (11:1–12:15), David was filled with desire for another man's wife (Bathsheba). If you don't remember the story, read it and acquaint yourself.

3. What do you think David's behavior reveals about his spirit? Was he spiritually full, satisfied, and content? If not, what words would you use to describe his spirit, given his behavior?

4. To what lengths does David go to achieve his desire? What values seem to be driving his behavior?

5. Given other biblical stories about King David, it seems he usually operated from other core values, like compassion, responsibility, faithfulness, and justice. Think about a time when you observed a leader betray long-held values. What did this do to your sense of confidence in his or her leadership?

Renewal was not on the king's mind as he *procured* Bathsheba. Not until Nathan the prophet confronted him. Nathan was not the only subject of the king who witnessed David's shameful behavior. Rather, he was the one we hear about because of the clever and potent

way he helped David to see the shamefulness of his behavior.

READ 2 SAMUEL 12:1–13.

6. What does David realize?

7. Do you think David would have heard Nathan's accusation if he had been more direct? Why or why not?

We could read this story of adultery simply as an example of what is (in our time) common tabloid news. For our purposes in thinking about renewal, however, we can learn something about how God works. Through Nathan, God imaginatively and lovingly sought a way to get around David's defenses in order to help him see, embrace, and own his need for renewal—for his own benefit and also for the well-being of others. (See "A Hard Truth," p. 26.)

8. Think of a time(s) when someone you know has imaginatively, lovingly and/or cleverly helped you see/embrace/own your need for renewal. Give thanks for them and for the God who put them up to it.

Hagar's witness

In Genesis 16:1–6 we meet Hagar, the Egyptian slave-girl of Sarai, Abram's barren wife (In chapter 16, their names have not yet been changed to Sarah and Abraham). In a practice that was not uncommon at that time, Sarai gives Hagar to Abram so that he might have a child through her.

Not unlike Mary, the mother of Jesus, Hagar is used by God to bring a new life into the world for the purpose of blessing. And like Mary, Hagar is willing to be part of God's purposefulness. However, once Hagar has conceived, trouble began brewing between

Hagar and Sarah. Sarah interprets Hagar's delight at the birth of her son Ishmael as also being a sign of contemptuousness at Sarah's barrenness. We don't know with certainty if Sarah is projecting her own insecurity on Hagar here or not. What we do know is that jealousy infects Sarah's relationship with Hagar, and the graciousness of Hagar in giving birth to Abraham's child for Abraham *and* Sarah's sake is not in any way returned by Sarah.

Sarah, in fact, treats Hagar so harshly (Genesis 16:6) that Hagar flees from Sarah into the wilderness. Even in our day we would know that it is an act of great desperation for a pregnant woman to flee into the wilderness alone. An angel of the Lord meets Hagar there, offers reassurance and blessing, and urges her to return to Sarah. Hagar responds: "Have I really seen God and remained alive?" Clearly renewed by this visit from God, Hagar returns and eventually bears a son—Ishmael. Peaceful coexistence ensues...for awhile.

In time, God's promise of a son to Abram/Abraham and Sarai/Sarah comes to pass and Isaac is born. The story of Hagar and Ishmael continues after the birth of Isaac in Genesis 21:8–21. Read it again to acquaint yourself.

9. What is Sarah worried about? What does she want for Isaac (verse 10)?
10. What values seem to be driving Sarah's behavior? Have they changed from before Isaac was born?
11. Sarah's fixation on her desire is much like King David's. Sarah's spirit was closed, reactive, vengeful, and blinded by her own desires. What does she do?

We can easily see that Sarah's spirit is in need of renewal. In this story, Sarah is not the one who is renewed. Hagar this time is our focus of attention, and she is now wandering for a second time in the wilderness.

No longer pregnant, now Hagar has a young child to care for and protect. The first time, Hagar fled on her own volition, and maybe thus was empowered by it. But this time, Hagar has been unfairly and unjustly sent off. Hagar reacts to this circumstance with feelings of despair. She cannot imagine a happy ending—only a tragic one. Hagar imagines that neither she nor her child will survive; and she is devastated by this thought.

12. How does God intervene (verses 17–19)?

Hagar does not need a Nathan to cleverly and skillfully reveal the cost of blindly acting on her desires. Hagar here is more like Job, a victim of misfortune so immense that there seems no escape. With God's intervention, she recovered the courage and fierceness she had lost. She is renewed.

13. Think of a time(s) when renewal for you has meant recovering your sense of hope, courage, fierceness or purpose. How did you learn that this was possible? What words or presence helped to empower you?

Trying it out

Renewal can take many shapes and have many meanings. In its simplest form, it could be like a trip to a spa—a treat whose nurture helps us recover a welcome zest for living. Renewal can also take on more serious and profound forms—intended to transform our lives when they are severely blinded or filled with despair. But no matter what form the renewal might take, we often have an initial resistance to it. (See "Breaking and Remaking," p. 14.)

Self-talk

When God talks to us about renewal it is always in a form that invites, inspires, and nurtures it. However, our own self-talk is frequently neither inviting

r affirming. When balancing our need for renewal against the responsibilities of our daily lives, our inner voice may tell us: "You don't have time for this now." Like Martha (Luke 10:38–42) or the elder son (Luke 15:11–32) we often seek to be responsible first and renewed afterward—if there is time for it.

4. How do you talk to yourself about renewal? What do you say to yourself about its importance, place and priority in your life?

Self-care

Renewal can range from repentance to daring co-creation. Renewal might be a leap of faith. It could be learning a new skill. Or it might be quiet solitude. The reason it changes shape and strategy is that its aim is transformation. For example, if your spirit is stagnant, renewal is the counter-action (movement of some kind) that restores balance and alignment with God's will. The opposite would also be true. If your spirit is inappropriately active, stillness might be what's called for. When King David and Hagar learned what kind of renewal they needed and saw God at work promoting their lives were transformed. (See "Time for a Tune-up," p. 22.)

15. Think about what kind of renewal you need right now. What state of being are you yearning for? Examples include: contentment, empowerment, patience, courage, and so forth.
16. What might you do to move yourself closer to that state of being?
17. How do you imagine or see God at work promoting this renewal in you and for you?

Closing

Light a candle and spend a few minutes in prayer looking over the answers to the questions in this study, particularly those that have invited you to reflect on your own life.

Close by reading or singing Psalm 51:10–12. 🌿

The Rev. Catherine Malotky and the Rev. David Engelstad have spent two and a half decades as ELCA pastors, serving congregations together in the early years, and then following separate ministerial paths into communications and chaplaincy. Their interests in spiritual direction, coaching, and faith formation inspired this Bible study. They are honored to be the parents of two 20-something daughters and two aging canines. They have just begun empty nesting and are enjoying hiking, biking, writing, and photography.



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Women of the **ELCA** 

RENEW

Getting Unstuck: Renewing Hardness of Heart

Overview of session concepts

In our culture, renewal is offered to us through all kinds of media, promising calm and ease. In fact, renewal can be quite trying, since to be truly renewed, something fundamental has to change in order for life to be different on the other side.

The idea of *hardness of heart* can so easily apply to any of us when we find ourselves out of hope and joy. Albert Einstein once said that a problem cannot be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. Another similar point says that continuing to do things the way you've always done them but expecting a different outcome is not going to solve the problem.

Renewal requires new perspectives, new ideas, new behaviors, and then we can be set on a new, better course. So renewal is not all about sipping iced tea on the beach! It's often hard work, disruptive, and even painful to get to the other side of a hard heart or a narrow perspective. But that's where renewal lies.

Our challenge as Christians is to trust God's redeeming power to bring new life into even the darkest of situations. The risen Christ is the best model of God's work among us: new life out of every death (of any kind).

Beginning

Reflection

Gather the group's attention and invite them to center their energy for the session ahead. You could light

a candle in silence as a way of creating a worshipful atmosphere. Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 51:10-11 slowly and meaningfully. Then invite participants to write in their journals. If you have time, you could create small groups to share their ideas with each other.

Learning from the saints

For these sections of Bible study, work your way through the stories together. If your group has not been exposed to these stories, take the time to read them aloud. If they know the stories, it would be good for you to brush up on them, since sometimes the stories we remember from Sunday school are a little sanitized.

King David's witness

3. He was not at his best. His spirit was preoccupied with his desire and power rather than living in balance and honoring his responsibility as king to honor his subjects.
4. He schemed to have Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed. He seemed to value his own wants over others: self satisfaction, power, etc.
5. You could note that for a while, King David had what he desired. For a while, it did not occur to him that pursuing Bathsheba and having Uriah killed had caused damage to not only his own spirit, but to the lives of Bathsheba's and Uriah's families. In fact, it threatened the integrity of his whole kingdom accord-

ing to Nathan's explanation (2 Samuel: 12:11–12).

Most participants will report that their confidence about the leader's capacity was diminished, and they may even have a strong sense of betrayal.

Nathan sought to clear David's eyes from the distortion of his desire (for Bathsheba) until David could see that taking Bathsheba from Uriah as he did, was utterly wrong. So wrong that the king confesses to Nathan: "I have sinned against the Lord."

Nathan told David a story. David listened. And David was moved. Moved to anger at the cruelty, injustice, and lack of compassion he heard in the story. Nathan did not say "This is a story about YOU" until David could see the story from Nathan's perspective. Or we might equally say, from God's perspective. If Nathan had not been patient and clever, David might have told him to go away, might have said "I'm the king and I get to have what I want."

Hagar's witness

9. She wants her son, Isaac, to be Abraham's sole heir.
10. Putting the best construction on everything, Sarah was trying to manipulate circumstances so Abraham could have a son. That same value seems to be at work here, too, but Sarah's jealousy, insecurity, and cruelty have emerged more clearly. She plainly doesn't want any competitors for Isaac, or herself, as his mother.
11. She demands that Abraham banish Hagar and Ishmael to the wilderness, which he does.
12. God hears the boy's voice and calls to Hagar, saying that she should not be afraid and promising her that God will make of her son a great nation, which implies that he will live.

Trying it out

This section is intentionally self-reflective. You will know your group best. If they do well sharing personal reflections, create small groups so they can do so. If they do not like sharing, affirm and invite them to do this privately. Any sharing will enhance the learning, as long as the point of view is non-judgmental and encouraging.

Closing

Do take the time to create a worshipful atmosphere at the end. This is an opportunity to draw everything together. You could close by reading the prayer for "Those seeking a deeper knowledge of God," *ELW*, p. 76.

Light a candle and ask the group to spend a few minutes in prayer looking over the answers to the questions in this study. Close by reading or singing Psalm 51:10–12. 🕯

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Renew, Respond, Rejoice!

by Inez Torres Davis



⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

— Philippians 4:4–9

This excerpt is adapted from a Women of the ELCA resource on the theme of the Triennial Gathering. You can find the original resource (along with many others) at www.womenoftheelca.org.

The Apostle Paul begins with the admonition to “Rejoice in the LORD always.” This pulls us into the current moment. Paul does not speak of joy as a past experience or as a future event. It is in *this moment* that we are to rejoice in all that God is and all that God has provided. Now is the appropriate time to rejoice in the LORD.

From this joy, Paul moves into instruction about community conduct. We are to be so gentle that people will know us for our gentleness. Gentleness is not weakness or a failure to act. We can be gentle because we are not anxious to prove a point or win an argument.

Our prayers acknowledge God’s faithfulness to us in all things with thanksgiving. The peace that passes understanding is often one result of prayer because prayer reminds us that we are always in God’s hands.

Being entirely secure in Christ, we can focus on loving, nurturing and caring with one another and the world. Paul told the saints of Philippi that rather than focus on their suffering, they were to think about God’s blessings.

There was anything positive to say, they were to say it. If there was anything good or pleasing to reflect on or to speak about, they were to focus on that.

These verses direct a large part of our individual lives. This biblical text is the foundation for the 2011 Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering theme: Renew, Respond, Rejoice!

ew
an organization that serves, organizes, advocates, and carries out life-changing ministries and relief efforts, Women of the ELCA participants may find that from time to time what they need

is to be renewed, to feel restored and rested.

Paul reminded the Philippians that God is the one who was doing a great work in them. Acknowledging how God has used us to bless others may not come easy for all of us. Yet, there is a sense of recognition of each other tucked into this verse. When we are able to recognize and declare that we are instruments of God’s work, we become open to accepting the energy, enthusiasm, and encouragement that comes with this knowledge.

The practices that Paul offered to the Philippians in chapter 4 are ones that renew body, soul, and spirit. Recalling God’s faithfulness provides boldness for renewed action. Looking for evidence of God’s presence—see Paul’s list of things to think and talk about (Philippians 4:8)—is another great way to be renewed.

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY: RENEW

You’ll need a box or two of little gold or silver stars—the kind teachers used to put on homework. Break into groups of two or three people. Write the following items on a piece of dark blue posterboard or construction paper. This posterboard will be your sky. Keep an informal tally of all items that are shared in your small group so you know how many stars to place in the sky.

Think of examples of ...

a thing that is true

a thing that is honorable

a thing that reflects God’s justice

a thing that shows God’s purity

a thing that is pleasing or commendable

Each group should choose one example to share with the larger group. Then come together as a whole group and tell each group’s example while visually showing it by placing silver and/or gold stars on a field of dark blue poster board.

Place one star for each item that is shared out loud.

As numerous as the stars in the sky are God’s many gifts to us! We are renewed by the promise that God continues to be revealed in our world today.

Look at the numerous stars on your sky.

Gratitude

Talk-show host Oprah Winfrey talks about her gratitude list but let's take that a step further. Ask yourself: What makes you feel blessed? What makes you smile?

Take some time to write down the answers. Then write down the names of people who make your heart smile and your spirit light. Reflect on those people and things that renew you. Write these down.

Think about the things you enjoy doing most. Start with the activities that cost very little money. Write these down on your list. This will help you follow Apostle Paul's admonition to think about "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise..."

Respond

Within the church, we often hear disagreement over what the response of God's people should be to one issue or another. Not only the issues are disputed, but even the approaches we take are debated. Do we pray or do we fight for what we want to happen? Do we pray or do we serve?

Re-read Philippians 4:6, 9. Both verses show features of God's call: as God's people, we do both.

We pray and we act. This is how we respond to God's saving grace and the issues that challenge us. Sometimes, we do them both at the same time, such as when making prayer shawls. We are praying and involved in action.

Perhaps the most subtle part of what we are to do in our response to God's grace is what we are not to do. The first item in verse six tells us that we are not to worry. It is impossible to worry when being held by the peace that passes understanding. In that peace, worry appears as the false phantom that it is. This is true even if we do not always remember it.

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY: GRATITUDE

Break into small groups of two or three and share a time when you experienced the peace of God that passes understanding. Think of a time when nearly everything or everyone was falling apart around you, but you had an inexplicable peace and calm.

Talk about as many of these experiences as time allows but be prepared to share just one example with the larger group. Keep a tally of all items that are shared so you know how many stars to place in the sky.

In the whole group, each small group should tell one example of "the peace that

passes understanding." On your poster board, put one star for each item that is shared out loud. Also include a star for each item shared in small groups from the tallies. The sky that is reflecting the point of your shared examples should be filling up with bright stars.

Isn't it amazing? Your group has an incredible array of stars in the sky. You can be renewed by celebrating the many times that knowing God's peace has made you able to respond to situations as a people. Remember this the next time you pass the peace of God in worship.



voice!

The third word of the 2011 Triennial Gathering theme is the first word of our biblical text in Philippians. Coming together as a community mobilizes us for renewal, response, and rejoicing. Our joy comes from our experiences with God and each other. When women of faith come together to lift up their voices and hearts to God to renew, respond, and rejoice, what follows is certain joy.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit that

we read about in Galatians. Without the joy of the Lord, how difficult these instructions in Philippians can sound. Especially now, it seems we all have family and friends who are facing hard times. People have lost their jobs. Relationships end. People we love die. Life brings blessings but it also brings sorrow and loss. Who among us has not felt these things?

Yet Paul encourages us to rejoice in the Lord *always*. Paul is reminding us that in all situations we are in a living relationship with God. This alone, Paul writes, is cause for celebration.

Rejoice! Sometimes joy cascades like a roaring waterfall; at other times it bubbles up quietly like a hidden fountain. These verses can be a reminder when hard times or heaviness threaten to hold us down.

Are we discouraged? Do we surrender to suffering? Have we picked up the idea that there is nobility in suffering? God has justified us and accepts us.

We are clothed in Christ's righteousness. What discourages us down? The spiritual practices of Philippians 4–9 help us recognize the good in even the worst situations and the most difficult people.

Rejoice! We are loved by God. Rejoice! We can ask God for anything we need. Rejoice! We have been blessed. In God's grace, the body of Christ can rejoice

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY: REJOICE

In small groups of two or three, share what brings you joy or feeds your joy in the Lord. Once you have a good list, share ideas for how to create more opportunities for these things to come into your life.

How will you open windows to allow more of these joyful breezes into your days?

Come together as a whole group and

tell one example of things that bring joy. Place one star for each item that is shared out loud. Your sky should be overflowing with stars.

Being able to always rejoice in God's love is a priceless gift that God has given to all of us. May we boldly take possession of this gift.

always. These verses remind us to claim the joy of the Lord that is our strength.

A community of faith

Renew, Respond, Rejoice! We have a wonderful circle of faith that will continue to grow as we journey together as God's people. Women of the ELCA's purpose statement (see page 21) says that we support one another in our callings. Part of our support of each other (and God's church) is coming together for times of learning, sharing, and serving.

Look at the numerous stars on your sky. Imagine multiplying this number by hundreds, by thousands, and yet more. Even then we would have only a small glimpse of the grace that is given to us in Christ Jesus.

Let us pray: *Precious Lord, we acknowledge you as a loving and generous Savior incapable of leaving us in suffering because you are always present with us. You bring us the peace that passes understanding, and you bring to our hearts and lives joy and gratitude. May we practice our faith in growing ways and may we be able to say with Paul, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again we will say, Rejoice!" In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.* 🌿

Inez Torres Davis is director for justice for Women of the ELCA.

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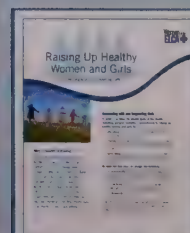
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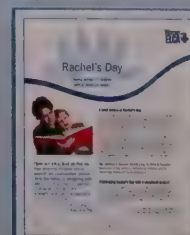
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Available at www.womenoftheelca.org



"I'm sharing this one with congregational youth and health ministries."



"This would be a good outreach program for our unit!"

Don't go on the Web much? Ask a younger woman or girl to help, or ask someone in your church office. It's good stewardship: printing the resources yourself allows your offerings to be used to create even more new resources.



FACE NOTES

Embrace change

Linda Post Bushkofsky



Back in 2008 two men

were running for mayor in a small Romanian village. The incumbent, one of the two candidates, died suddenly. It was too late to reprint the ballots or call off the election, so it proceeded. Despite his death, the incumbent was re-elected. "I know he died," one villager told reporters, "but I don't want change."

Aren't we all a bit like that villager? We can stare down reality, knowing full well that something dear to us is no longer the same, and despite it all, we say, I don't want change!

I know this to be true in some congregational units of Women of the ELCA. The units are clinging to a model that served the group well 50 years ago but the participants, in dwindling numbers, fail to take into account changing realities. Let's face it, you can't complain that younger women don't attend a meeting if the meeting is scheduled for Tuesday afternoons at 2 p.m. when the younger women are working or greeting children as they come home from school.

Some units remember the "glory days" when they created 200 or 300 relief quilts each year, but now participants are sad that just a few women are able to produce 50 quilts annually. There may be many reasons why the numbers have dropped, but there could be ways in which production could increase if, for example, the time or method of production was changed.

Why do we avoid change? What is familiar is comforting. In a world with so much change, sticking with the familiar

is safe and easy. For some, a sense of lethargy sets in. For some, fear takes hold. What if I don't like the change? What if I can't manage in the new situation? What if I'm no longer valued because what I do is no longer needed?

"But we've always done it that way!" That's likely not true. Your unit may have done something a particular way for a period of time (as long as you can remember, perhaps?), but if you check your history, you'll probably find that previous generations did things differently. What may seem nearly sacred to you—the holiday bazaar, support of a local agency, quilt making—is just one incarnation of women living out their faith. What may seem nearly sacred to you may seem antiquated to others who bring a different perspective to their walk of faith. If you were to shut out those others, whether you intend to or not, you limit the body of Christ, establishing barriers where none exist.

This issue contains many articles that speak to renewal and change. While most address renewal and change for an individual, the same principles apply to groups. Re-read the articles from the perspective of your group. How would these articles speak to enabling your congregational unit to change? How would they challenge your group to renewal? As we approach the 25th anniversary of Women of the ELCA, where might the Holy Spirit be leading your unit into the next 25 years? 🌿

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

Impasse Interrupt

by Catherine Malotky

She now felt stalled out.

At an impasse. Nothing seemed to be aligning with the life she yearned for. Hope was hard to come by, the future hard to imagine. She could not see God at work in her life. She was eating too much, reaching out too rarely, and turning inward more and more.

She could observe this in herself. Life was moving too fast, and it did not seem to have a place for her. She knew recent changes in her health were confounding. She had to learn to cope in new ways, but that learning was coming slowly. She wished for the way it was before.

She might have been depressed. Actually, she probably was, even if it was because of her circumstances and not a brain chemistry problem. To her, the changes her maladies demanded seemed unfair. She was angry, and her anger was showing up in self-defeating behaviors.

If you have ever been at an impasse, you know it will take her time and energy to find a new way to be herself. Her life has changed around her, and now it's up to her to catch up. Oh, God, what a little renewal would do for a person!

But it's not easy to break out, to find a new way to see life, to redefine what it means to be worthy and of value. It's not easy. The familiar is, well, familiar. Why can't what used to work always work?

Why, God, does growth seem to require pain first? Why must a seed die before it sprouts? Why must Good Friday come before the joy of Easter? Why is this so often life's path? Perhaps the mystery of your love lies in the interrup-

tion, the place where impasse is broken open, and even a glimmer of hope planted. Perhaps it is your redeeming power that draws our eyes away from the rear-view mirror and out the window so we might see what surrounds us, and what lies ahead.

So seeds are planted. Something sparks germination and growth. Something that is God.

Perhaps it is a dear friend who lifts your face and speaks aloud of what she sees in you. Perhaps it is a stern command of upstance. A reminder that pity parties can only go on so long. That others are relying on you. Perhaps it is simply the passage of time that brings renewal, the space to let trust take root and grow your own slow evolution.

So seedlings emerge, a reliable witness to the power of life, God-given, and a promise of harvest someday.

When I am stuck, God, open my eyes, renew my vision. I yearn to see you, your redemptive hand, the hope of renewal and a new day. When my heart is hard, make me thankful for its breaking open. When my heart is weak, make me grateful for your demand to be with vigor. And when I am aligned with you, renew my trust in your providing all that I need and all that I am. Open my eyes, renew my vision, so I might see your abundance everywhere I look. In Jesus' name. Amen. 🌿

The Rev. Catherine Malotky, an ELCA pastor, serves at Luther Seminary as a philanthropy adviser. She has served as a parish pastor, editor, teacher, and retreat leader.

MOMS MEET, MINGLE, MUNCH AT CAFÉ CHOCOLATE SPA

The staff of Women of the ELCA held a Chocolate Spa networking event for young adult moms earlier this year at a nail salon in the Chicago area. About 20 women met, mingled, and munched on snacks and chocolate desserts while having their toenails and fingernails manicured. Many of the participants were members of suburban Lutheran congregations. The event was sponsored by *Café*, the e-zine (www.boldcafe.org) produced by Women of the ELCA. Participants learned more about the organization, and two formed *Café* Bible study groups as a result of the event.

—Photos by Elizabeth McBride, editor of *Café*



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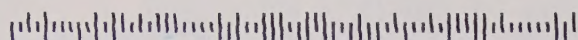
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